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NBC BRIEFING

17 MAY 1956

SINGAPORE

- I. London talks on self-rule collapsed 15 May on internal security issue.
 - A. Elaborate precautions taken to deal with any resulting violence in Colony.
 - B. Breakdown likely benefit local Communists.
- II. Marshall says he will resign (8 June).
- III. Legislative Assembly will have trouble forming new government.
 - A. Any new regime will probably be "caretaker," pending new elections.
 - B. British could postpone new elections.
- IV. Communist-manipulated People's Action Party stands good chance winning any election held now.
 - A. British prepared to revoke constitution, resume direct control if this happens.
- V. Repercussions of talk failures will be felt in Malaya.
 - A. Jeopardizes prospects eventual Singapore-Malaya merger.

25 YEAR RE-REVIEW

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NSC BRIEFING

16 MAY 1956

COLLAPSE OF SINGAPORE TALKS

1. The London talks on self-rule for Singapore collapsed on 15 May over their most sensitive issue: the extent to which the British would retain control of the island colony's internal security. Singapore's security forces have taken elaborate precautions to deal with any local outbreak of violence as a result of the broken negotiations. However, the prospect is that their failure will give further impetus to the growth of Communist influence, particularly among the colony's 800,000 Chinese.

2. Singapore's Chief Minister, David Marshall, who dominated the negotiations and held firm to his demand that local authorities be given full control over internal security, has stated that he will resign at next scheduled meeting of Singapore's cabinet (6 June). Representatives of the Communist-manipulated People's Action Party, who were among members of the delegation, permitted Marshall to play his predominant role in London apparently in the conviction that their party could capitalize equally on his success or failure.

3. If and after Marshall actually resigns, it is probable that the Singapore Legislative Assembly will be given an opportunity to form a new government. The Assembly is so badly divided, however, that it is questionable whether agreement on a new Chief Minister will be possible. Some conservative Chinese member would have the best chance of being chosen, but any regime such a man would be able to establish would probably serve only as a "caretaker". New elections appear inevitable unless the British exercise their "emergency" powers to postpone them.

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4. Any election in the near future, would probably be won by the People's Action Party. Should this happen, the British have indicated they are prepared to revoke Singapore's constitution and reassume direct rule.

5. The breakdown of the London talks will also have repercussions beyond Singapore as it is likely to jeopardize the prospects of Singapore's admission to the Federation of Malaya--a development which the British had regarded as a partial solution of the Singapore problem. The Malayan government is reluctant to get involved in Singapore's difficulties and has refused to consider the latter's admission until August 1957 at the earliest. It will probably now be even more unwilling to consider merging with Singapore.

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